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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to compare characteristics desired by college English teachers in a composition handbook with the characteristics actually found in those recently published in order to help teachers in the selection of this resource. Data were collected through a questionnaire sent to 200 members (170 responded) of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and through a panel's analysis of physical and textual characteristics and subject matter coverage in 20 recently published handbooks. The two groups of data were then compared, revealing that (1) Regarding physical characteristics, teachers wanted an inexpensive, concise handbook with exercises, an instructor's manual, and a workbook. None of the recently published handbooks fulfilled all of these requirements. (2) Regarding textual characteristics, teachers stated many preferences regarding spacing, structure, nonbiased sex and racial content, and style. Only 7 of the 20 handbooks were rated as satisfactory on every item. (3) For subject matter, teachers wanted a handbook that treats grammar, usage, punctuation, mechanics, words, sentences, and paragraphs with both breadth and depth. No handbook was judged satisfactory in its treatment of every one of these subject areas. (CC)

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A COMPARISON OF CHARACTERISTICS DESIRED BY COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHERS IN A COMPOSITION HANDBOOK WITH CHARACTERISTICS OF RECENT COMPOSITION HANDBOOKS

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Nell Ann Pickett

Hinds Junior College

Traditionally, the English composition handbook has been a basic teaching-learning tool. The composition handbook has become a well established textbook and reference work for both student and teacher. The following passage from a recent novel describes a typical situation--a student has received a poor grade on his first theme in freshman English and the teacher explains to the student:

> Your writing is very moving, Mr. Bartlett, but there is some confusion in the chronological sequence--for instance you mention training camp on the second page, and you talk about a sniper, and when your father died, and . . . . Your theme lacks unity, you will have to learn to compress and condense, you will have to learn to emphasize certain ideas, do you see, and your spelling and grammar . . . well, you will profit from practice, and have you gone to the bookstore yet to get the Handbook? That will help you a great deal, why, I consult the Handbook myself, it's invaluable. . . .[1]

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The English composition handbook is indeed a valuable resource. Very little empirical data have been available, however, to guide the college English teacher in the selection of an appropriate composition handbook. This situation is all the more bewildering when one considers the number of college students enrolled in English composition courses and the sizable percentage of these students who use a handbook, when one considers the traditional homage that is paid the handbook, and when one considers the economics in numbers and dollars of handbook sales.

To date, however, very little research has been done concerning English composition handbooks. Occasionally English teachers have voiced their dissatisfaction with certain aspects of handbooks, such as their inconclusiveness concerning grammatical usage,[2] their sexual bias against women,[3] or the inappropriateness of certain handbooks for particular students;[4] even less occasionally, English teachers have analyzed recently published handbooks.[5] In the main, however, very little has been written about what is desired in English composition handbooks and about what is actually found in composition handbooks.

PURPOSE AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to compare characteristics desired by college English teachers in a composition handbook with the characteristics actually found in recently published handbooks. To make the comparison, the researcher first collected data concerning desired characteristics and actual characteristics and then compared and contrasted specific aspects of the data.

Data for the study were collected in two ways: through a questionnaire sent to a sample of college English teachers and through a panel's analysis of recently published composition handbooks. The questionnaire, designed by the researcher, contained questions concerning desired physical characteristics in a handbook; questions concerning desired textual characteristics in a handbook; and questions concerning desired subject matter in a handbook.

The questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 200 of the 562 members of the Conference on College Composition and Communication whose mailing addresses were in the nine Southeastern states. Of the 200 persons sent the questionnaire, 170 or 85.0 percent, responded. Not all of the responses were useable, however. Of the 170 responses, 135 were useable and 35 were not. The 35 non-useable responses included 28 from persons not currently teaching

college English composition, one from a person who said that she did not wish to participate, and six from persons who sent in their questionnaires too late for inclusion in the study.

The other source of data, in addition to the questionnaire, was a thorough analysis of recently published English composition handbooks. In determining which handbooks to include, the researcher used these criteria: only handbooks which had a copyright date of 1976 or 1977, or which had firmly established themselves by being at least in a third edition. Twenty handbooks met these criteria; see Appendix A for a list of the handbooks. Each handbook was analyzed and evaluated on a number of specific items in these four categories: physical characteristics, textual characteristics, subject matter areas, and subject matter topics.

The physical characteristics were analyzed by the researcher. She supplied the information from an examination of the handbooks, the 1977 edition of Books in Print and its supplements, flyers from publishing companies, publishers' advertisements in professional journals, and the researcher's correspondence with English editors in publishing companies.

The second, third, and fourth categories--textual characteristics, subject matter areas, and subject matter topics--involved evaluations by a panel of three experi-

enced English composition teachers. The panelists individually rated each handbook as to its efficiency in the specific items in each category on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable rating. For each item in each category, a mean rating of the panelists' efficiency evaluations was calculated. In addition, for each of the three categories--textual characteristics, subject matter areas, and subject matter topics--a mean rating was calculated; and for each handbook, an overall mean rating was calculated. To facilitate the work of the panelists, the researcher supplied for each handbook the page numbers of the section or sections treating the specific items in the two subject matter categories, and the researcher gave each panelist evaluation guidelines for the three categories. (See Appendix B for the evaluation guidelines.)

After data from the two sources of information--the questionnaire to teachers and the handbook analyes by panelists--were gathered, the two sets of data were compared. An item by item comparison was made of physical characteristics (number of pages, binding, cost, and ancillary material), textual characteristics (page layout, accessibility of information, appropriateness of examples, author's attitude toward language and dialect, style and tone, and race and sex objec-

tivity), and subject matter characteristics (grammar and usage, punctuation, words, sentences, paragraphs, whole compositions, and library research papers). Finally, an assessment was made of the degree to which characteristics desired by college English teachers in a composition handbook were found in existing handbooks.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are discussed under these three headings:

1. Characteristics desired in a handbook
2. Characteristics of existing handbooks
3. Comparison of desired characteristics and characteristics in existing handbooks.

Characteristics Desired in a Handbook

The characteristics that English teachers desired in a handbook can be grouped as physical characteristics, textual characteristics, and subject matter characteristics.

Physical characteristics. Teachers were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable, five physical characteristics. Characteristics were deemed desirable if they received a mean rating of 1 to 3.5 and not desirable if they received a mean rating of 3.6 to 6. All

of the characteristics were found to be desirable. The characteristics with the mean rating of each are as follows: the cost of a handbook should be less than $6.00, 3.3; the total number of pages should be fewer than 300, 2.8; exercises should be included, 2.5; an instructor's manual should be available, 3.0; and a companion workbook should be available, 3.3. Teachers were also asked to indicate the binding that they prefer in a handbook. There was no consensus on this item: 28.7 percent of the respondents indicated cloth, 31.8 percent indicated paper, and 39.5 percent indicated that the kind of binding made no difference.

Textual characteristics. To determine teachers' preference in textual characteristics of handbooks, teachers were asked questions concerning page layout, accessibility of information, examples, attitude toward language, style and tone, and race and sex objectivity in a handbook.

When asked to rank five page-layout characteristics in the order of their effectiveness from 1 to 5, with 1 the most effective, teachers ranked the characteristics in this order: (1) emphatic spacing, (2) boxes for most important concepts, (3) two or more colors of ink, (4) many headings, and (5) variety of type styles.

Teachers were asked to rank in the order of 1 to 6, with 1 the most effective, six characteristics

concerning accessibility of information. The characteristics were ranked in this order: (1) detailed index, (2) quick reference charts on endpapers, (3) detailed table of contents, (4) guide words on each page, (5) chapter tabs, and (6) color key. In addition, teachers were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable, whether a code system for rules should be included in a handbook. A mean rating of 1 to 3.5 indicated that the characteristic was desirable; a mean rating of 3.6 to 6, not desirable. The mean rating by teachers for a code system for rules was 3.1.

Teachers were asked several questions concerning examples. First, they were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable, whether every rule, practice, or concept should be followed with one or more examples. A mean rating of 1 to 3.5 indicated that the characteristic was desirable; a mean rating of 3.6 to 6, not desirable. The mean rating for this item was 1.4. Then, teachers were asked to rank in the order of 1 to 8, with 1 the most desirable, what they thought should be sources for examples. The sources were ranked as follows: (1) student papers, (2) combination of sources, (3) thought-provoking essays, (4) well-known writers, (5) popular periodicals, (6) humanistic-centered articles, (7) no particular source, and (8) professional journals. Last,

teachers were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable, the desirability of student-related examples in a handbook. A mean rating of 1 to 3.6 indicated that student-related examples were important; a mean rating of 3.6 to 6, not important. This item received a mean rating of 1.8.

Ten questions were asked concerning what a handbook should reflect about language and dialect. Teachers were asked to answer each question with a yes, no, or no opinion response. An answer receiving 51 percent or more consensus was considered the teachers' preference. Teachers said that an English composition handbook should do these things: emphasize that the English language is constantly changing, give reasons and background for usage practices, describe conventional usage, emphasize that there are various levels of acceptable usage, and present various acceptable practices regarding language usage. Teachers said that an English composition handbook should not do these things: prescribe what is correct usage, explain that there is one correct grammatical standard for all users of American English, and in 1977 be essentially the same as an English composition handbook in 1957 or 1997. Opinion was divided on whether a handbook should set forth rules of what is right and wrong in language and whether a handbook should warn against incorrect usage.

Teachers were asked to mark with a yes, no, or no opinion response six statements regarding style and tone in a handbook. Statements receiving a 51 percent or more consensus were considered the teachers' preferences. English teachers preferred these characteristics: a handbook should be addressed to the student in terms of you, the presentation of material should be informal, and a handbook should have a straightforward, no-nonsense attitude. Teachers said no to the two statements that a handbook should be formal in its language and presentation and that a light, colloquial stance is desirable. Opinion was divided on whether a handbook should be eye-catching with such features as drawings, illustrations, comic characters, and a colorful cover.

When asked whether an English composition handbook should be free from racial and sexual bias, 91.9 percent said yes, 1.5 percent said no, and 6.7 percent said they had no opinion on the matter.

Subject matter characteristics. Teachers were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most essential, forty-four randomly selected items pertaining to subject matter. Items receiving a rating of 1 to 3.5 were considered essential; and items receiving a rating of 3.6 to 6, not essential. The subject matter items can be grouped into these

categories: grammar and usage, punctuation and mechanics, words, sentences, paragraphs, whole compositions, library research papers, and miscellaneous.

All of the grammar and usage items were rated essential. These items with their mean rating are as follows: correction chart, 2.8; parts of speech, 2.7; differences in dialect, 2.9; glossary of grammatical terms, 2.3; list of principal parts of irregular verbs, 2.8; and levels of usage, 1.9.

Each of the items concerning punctuation and mechanics was found to be essential. These are the items and their mean rating: punctuation, 1.4; capitalization, 1.7; and mechanics, 1.7.

All of the items pertaining to words, or diction, were found to be essential, as indicated by their mean rating: spelling 2.1; conciseness, 1.9; use of the dictionary, 2.3; and figures of speech, 3.3.

Of the five items relating to sentences, four were considered essential and one (sentence diagraming) not essential. The items and their mean rating are as follows: sentence patterns, 1.6; sentence diagraming, 4.8; sentence fragments, 1.8; subordination in sentences, 1.6; and sentence units, 1.8.

Both items concerning paragraphs were found to be essential: paragraph development, 1.5; and paragraph organization, 1.5.

A number of items related to the whole composition from inception to revision and to types of whole compositions. All of the items, except five types of whole compositions (social letter writing, articles for publication, laboratory reports, memorandums, and progress reports) were rated as essential. The following are all the items and their mean rating: answering essay questions, 2.7; business letter writing, 3.5; social letter writing, 4.7; reports on books or articles, 3.4; writing essays (themes) about literature, 3.4; choosing and narrowing a subject, 1.8; audience analysis, 2.8; persuasive writing, 2.7; formal outlines, 2.6; articles for publication, 5.1; revising a paper, 1.9; laboratory reports, 4.3; fallacies in logical thinking, 2.8; prewriting, 2.1; memorandums, 4.6; and progress reports, 4.6.

Teachers rated all of the items pertaining to writing a research paper as essential. These are the items and their mean rating: using the library, 2.8; writing a research paper (library paper), 2.4; documentation of papers in the humanities, 2.9; documentaion of papers in the sciences, 3.2; and taking notes, 2.7.

All three miscellaneous items were rated as non-essential. The items and their mean rating are as follows: giving a speech, 4.7; using graphics and other visuals, 4.4; and keeping a journal, 4.1.

Characteristics of Existing Handbooks

Each of the recently published English composition handbooks was analyzed and evaluated on a number of specific items in these four categories: physical characteristics, textual characteristics, subject matter areas, and subject matter topics. The researcher analyzed the handbooks as to their physical characteristics. A panel of three experienced college teachers of English composition analyzed the handbooks as to their textual characteristics, subject matter areas, and subject matter topics.

Physical characteristics. An analysis of physical characteristics involved an objective listing of information concerning each handbook: number of pages in the body and in the index, trim size in inches, number of index entries, binding (cloth or paper or both), cost, inclusion of exercises (yes or no), inclusion of endpaper material (yes or no), availability of an instructor's manual (yes or no), and availability of a workbook (yes or no).

The handbooks varied greatly in most of their physical characteristics, as shown in Table 1. While all of them included endpaper material (typically correction charts), all but four included writing exercises. Of particular note was the wide divergence of emphasis on index material. Three of the handbooks--those by Crews, Irmscher, and Perrin and

Table 1

Physical Characteristics of Recently Published Handbooks

Handbook	Number of pages		Trim size[a]	No. of index entries	Binding	Cost	Exercises	Endpaper material	Instructor's manual	Workbook
	Text	Index								
Baker	549	10	6-1/4x8-1/2	973	cloth	$8.25	yes	yes	yes	no
Bell and Cohn	206	6	5-1/2x8-1/2	471	paper	3.95	no	yes	no	no
Corbett	219	4	4-3/4x7	169	paper	3.95	no	yes	no	no
Crews	459	20	6-1/4x9-1/4	2006	cloth	6.95	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ebbitt and Ebbitt	309	-	6x9	-	paper	4.95	no	yes	no	no
Elsbree and Bracher	408	22	5x8	1776	both	5.95p 7.95c	yes	yes	yes	yes
Glorfeld et al.	204	5	5-1/4x8-1/4	329	paper	4.95	yes	yes	no	no
Gorrell and Laird	484	10	7x9-1/4	1356	cloth	8.95	yes	yes	yes	no
Guth	450	14	5x7-1/2	997	paper	6.95	yes	yes	yes	no[b]
Hodges and Whitten	447	30	4-3/4x7	1563	cloth	6.95	yes	yes	yes	yes
Irmscher	520	19	6-1/2x9-1/4	2011	cloth	8.95	yes	yes	yes	no

[a] In inches, to nearest 1/4 inch.

[b] A workbook will be published in January 1978.

Table 1 (continued)

Handbook	Number of pages: Text	Number of pages: Index	Trim size[a]	No. of index entries	Binding	Cost	Exercises	Endpaper material	Instructor's manual	Workbook
Jacobs and Jacobs	260	8	6x7-1/2	604	paper	$4.50	yes	yes	yes	yes
Kierzek et al.	491	28[b]	5-1/4x8-1/4	1780[c]	paper	5.95	yes	yes	yes	yes
Lefcowitz	380	13	5-1/2x8-1/4	1154	cloth	6.95	yes	yes	yes	yes
Leggett et al.	497	18	5-1/4x8-1/4	1628	cloth	6.95	yes	yes	yes	no
Perrin and Corder	497	32	5-1/2x7-1/2	2487[d]	both	6.95p 8.50c	yes	yes	yes	yes
Rorabacher	317	7	5-1/4x8	448	cloth	4.95	yes	yes	yes	yes
Stone and Bell	303	11	5-1/4x8	783	paper	6.95	no	yes	no	no
Watkins et al.	333	19	4-3/4x6-3/4	1187	paper	5.25	yes	yes	no[e]	no
Wiener and Bazerman	331	11	5-1/4x8-1/4	687	paper	5.95	yes	yes	yes	no

[a] In inches, to nearest 1/4 inch.

[b] Includes pages of "Index to Quoted Passages."

[c] Includes entries in "Index to Quoted Passages."

[d] Excludes references to exercises.

[e] An annotated instructor's edition of the handbook is available.

Corder--had more than two thousand index entries each, while five of the handbooks had fewer than five hundred index entries each. Of these five handbooks--three--the ones by Bell and Cohn, Ebbitt and Ebbitt, and Glorfeld et al.--were organized alphabetically rather than by subject matter.

Textual characteristics. The panel of three experienced English teachers individually evaluated each handbook on the following textual characteristics: page layout, accessibility of information, cross references, appropriateness of examples, author's attitude toward language and dialect, style and tone, race objectivity, sex objectivity, and overall appeal. The rating was on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 as the most desirable. A mean rating for each textual item of each handbook evaluated by the panelists was calculated. In addition, an overall mean rating of textual characteristics for each handbook was figured. A rating of 1 to 3.5 was considered satisfactory; a rating of 3.6 to 6, unsatisfactory. Although most of the handbooks were unsatisfactory on at least one item, only three had an unsatisfactory overall mean rating on textual characteristics. See Table 2. The Crews handbook received the best rating, 2.3, followed closely by the Irmscher handbook, 2.4.

Table 2

Rating of Textual Characteristics of Recently Published Handbooks

Handbook	Page layout	Accessibility of info.	Cross references	Appropriate examples	Author's att. toward lang. and dialect	Style and tone	Race objectivity	Sex objectivity	Overall appeal	Mean
Baker	2.7[a]	2.7	3.3	2.7	2.7	2.3	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7
Bell and Cohn	3.0	2.3	3.0	2.3	2.7	2.7	3.0	3.0	3.3	2.8
Corbett	3.0	2.7	3.7	3.0	3.0	2.7	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Crews	2.0	3.0	2.7	2.3	1.7	2.0	2.3	2.3	2.0	2.3
Ebbitt and Ebbitt	4.3	2.7	3.3	4.0	2.7	3.7	2.7	2.3	4.0	3.3
Elsbree and Bracher	3.3	3.7	4.0	3.0	3.3	3.7	3.3	3.3	4.0	3.5
Glorfeld et al.	5.0	3.3	4.7	4.0	3.0	3.3	3.7	3.3	4.3	3.8
Gorrell and Laird	2.3	2.7	2.0	2.3	2.7	3.0	3.0	2.7	2.7	2.6
Guth	3.3	2.7	4.0	4.0	2.3	3.0	3.3	3.0	3.7	3.3
Hodges and Whitten	3.7	2.7	3.0	3.7	3.0	3.7	3.3	3.0	3.3	3.3
Irmscher	3.0	2.7	2.7	2.0	2.0	2.3	2.3	2.7	2.3	2.4

[a]Efficiency rating on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable.

Table 2 (continued)

Handbook	Page layout	Accessibility of info.	Cross references	Appropriate examples	Author's att. toward lang. and dialect	Style and tone	Race objectivity	Sex objectivity	Overall appeal	Mean
Jacobs and Jacobs	4.0[a]	3.3	4.7	3.7	3.0	3.3	2.7	3.0	3.7	3.5
Kierzek et al.	3.7	2.7	3.3	3.7	3.0	3.7	3.0	3.0	3.3	3.3
Lefcowitz	3.7	2.7	3.3	2.7	3.0	2.7	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Leggett et al.	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.3	3.0	3.7	3.0	3.0	3.7	3.3
Perrin and Corder	3.3	3.0	3.0	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.3	2.7	2.7	2.8
Rorabacher	3.7	2.7	4.0	3.7	4.0	4.1	3.3	3.3	4.0	3.6
Stone and Bell	4.3	3.0	4.0	2.3	2.0	2.3	2.7	2.7	2.3	2.8
Watkins et al.	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	3.0	3.7	3.3	2.7	2.9
Wiener and Bazerman	3.3	4.0	4.3	3.0	3.3	4.0	3.0	3.3	4.0	3.6

[a]Efficiency rating on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable.

Subject matter areas. The panel of teachers evaluated the handbooks as to these subject matter areas: grammar and usage, punctuation, words, sentences, paragraphs, whole compositions, and library research papers. The rating of each item was on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable. A mean rating for each subject matter item of each handbook evaluated by the panelists was computed. Also, an overall mean rating of subject matter areas for each handbook was figured. A rating of 1 to 3.5 was considered satisfactory; a rating of 3.6 to 6, unsatisfactory. See Table 3 for the handbook ratings. While most of the handbooks were unsatisfactory on at least one item, several handbooks did not treat at all the area of whole compositions. Five handbooks had an unsatisfactory overall mean rating on subject matter areas. The handbooks receiving the best overall ratings were those by Irmscher, 2.1, Crews, 2.3, and Perrin and Corder, 2.4.

Subject matter topics. The panel of English teachers evaluated the coverage of these subject matter topics: subject-verb agreement, use of semicolon, wordiness, subordination in sentences, topic sentences, revising a composition, and documentation. The panelists rated each subject matter topic on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable. A mean rating of the panelists' individual

Table 3

Page Numbers and Rating of Subject Matter Areas of Recently Published Handbooks

Handbook	Grammar and usage		Punctuation		Words		Sentences		Paragraphs		Whole compositions		Library research papers		Mean rating
	Pages	Eff.[a]	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	
Baker	364-400 456-514	2.3	402-445	2.3	117-196	3.0	132-162 368-371	3.0	48-61 98-129	2.0	1-47 62-65	2.7	297-336 533-549	3.0	2.6
Bell and Cohn	passim	4.0	passim	3.3	passim	4.0	passim	3.7	passim	4.0	-	6.0	165-197	3.7	4.1
Corbett	6-41 186-192 196-217	3.7	77-120	2.7	44-64	2.7	55-58	4.7	65-76	3.3	-	6.0	126-168	2.7	3.7
Crews	262-323 402-434	2.3	328-355	2.0	100-121	3.0	128-150	2.3	156-196	2.7	26-61	2.0	203-260	2.0	2.3
Ebbitt and Ebbitt	passim	3.7	passim	3.3	passim	3.3	passim	4.0	passim	4.0	-	6.0	passim	4.7	4.1
Elsbree and Bracher	308-328 395-408	3.7	331-358	3.0	21-64	3.3	65-131	3.0	131-190	3.3	198-213	2.7	240-297	3.3	3.2
Glorfeld et al.	199-204 passim	4.3	passim	4.0	passim	3.7	95-99	5.0	69-72 136-149	5.0	3-11	4.3	160-176	4.0	4.3
Gorrell and Laird	460-481	3.0	401-425	3.3	283-316	2.7	173-267	2.3	31-49	3.3	-	6.0	58-75 367-395	3.0	3.4
Guth	1-75 391-422	3.7	285-330	2.7	99-125	4.0	129-160	2.7	163-185	3.3	189-247	2.7	333-390	3.0	3.2
Hodges and Whitten	2-72	3.0	104-157	3.3	174-233	3.3	236-293	2.7	298-329	2.7	331-349	2.7	351-414	2.7	2.9
Irmscher	423-489	2.3	194-212	2.7	128-147 490-497	2.3	105-125	2.3	83-101	2.0	49-79	1.7	235-296	1.7	2.1
Jacobs and Jacobs	137-164	3.7	220-235	3.3	167-191	3.3	passim	4.0	passim	3.7	passim	3.7	105-133	2.3	3.4

[a]Efficiency rating on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable.

Table 3 (continued)

Handbook	Grammar and usage		Punctuation		Words		Sentences		Paragraphs		Whole compositions		Library research papers		Mean rating
	Pages	Eff.[a]	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	
Kierzek et al.	231-284 469-491	2.7	309-353	2.3	368-445	2.7	147-200	2.7	201-224 447-464	2.7	32.77	2.7	81-130	2.7	2.6
Lefcowitz	275-319 362-380	2.7	242-272	3.3	152-189	2.3	112-146	2.3	70-109	2.0	28-65	2.7	326-358	3.0	2.6
Leggett et al.	17-94 360-389	3.0	107-152	2.7	312-358	3.3	265-294	3.0	212-251	3.0	158-210	2.7	403-470	3.0	3.0
Perrin and Corder	33-145	2.7	151-189	2.3	299-348	2.3	353-281	2.7	384-402	2.3	229-295	1.7	450-497	3.0	2.4
Rorabacher	129-174 293-316	4.0	187-219	2.7	45-71	3.0	109-124	4.0	27-40	3.3	1-23	3.0	227-260	3.0	3.3
Stone and Bell	141-174 259-303	3.3	191-210	2.3	95-114	2.3	77-94	2.3	59-76	2.0	-	6.0	213-258	2.3	2.9
Watkins et al.	1-44 310-333	2.7	81-119	3.0	145-183	2.7	46-73	3.0	197-212	3.3	223-241	2.3	257-308	3.0	2.9
Wiener and Bazerman	137-173	4.0	179-187	3.3	5-22	4.3	115-130	4.0	235-262	2.7	223-233	3.3	291-307	4.3	3.7

[a]Efficiency rating on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable.

ratings for each subject matter topic was calculated. In addition, an overall mean rating of subject matter topics for each handbook was computed. A rating of 1 to 3.5 was considered satisfactory; a rating of 3.6 to 6, unsatisfactory. Although some of the handbooks fared well in regard to some of the items, eleven of the handbooks received an unsatisfactory overall rating on their coverage of subject matter topics. See Table 4. Receiving the best rating was the Crews handbook, 2.5; next were the handbooks by Irmscher, Perrin and Corder, and Stone and Bell, each with a rating of 2.9.

Overall ratings of handbooks. From the mean ratings of the panelists' evaluations of textual characteristics, subject matter areas, and subject matter topics, an overall mean rating for each handbook was figured, as shown in Table 5. Ratings were based on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable. Handbooks receiving a rating of 1 to 3.5 were considered satisfactory; handbooks receiving a rating of 3.6 to 6, unsatisfactory.

The handbooks, in the order of their overall ratings, are as follows: Crews, 2.4; Irmscher, 2.5; Perrin and Corder, 2.7; Baker, 2.8; Stone and Bell, 2.9; Gorrell and Laird, 3.0; Kierzek et al., 3.0; Watkins et al., 3.0; Hodges and Whitten, 3.1; Lefowitz, 3.1; Leggett et al., 3.3; Elsbree and Bracher, 3.4; Guth, 3.4; Bell and Cohn, 3.5; Jacobs

Table 4

Page Numbers and Rating of Subject Matter Topics of Recently Published Handbooks

Handbook	Subject-verb agreement		Use of semicolon		Wordiness		Subordination in sentences		Topic sentences		Revising a composition		Documentation		Mean rating
	Pages	Eff.[a]	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	
Baker	374-376	4.0	424-425	2.7	163-176 193-196	1.7	139-141	3.3	50-51	3.7	26-30	2.7	306-318	3.0	3.0
Bell and Cohn	9-12	2.7	126-128	3.0	161-162	4.0	141-142	3.7	146-147	3.7	-	6.0	171-197	3.0	3.7
Corbett	13-17	3.0	95-99	3.3	57-58	4.7	-	6.0	-	6.0	-	6.0	137-152	3.0	4.6
Crews	304-307	2.3	341-342	3.0	107-108 141-142	3.7	135-141	2.0	157-161	2.3	44-61	2.0	222-260	2.0	2.5
Ebbitt and Ebbitt	24-25	4.3	253-254	4.0	305-306	4.3	270-271	5.0	285-286	4.0	-	6.0	46-48 313-134 247	4.3	4.6
Elsbree and Bracher	309-313	3.3	324-347	3.0	44-45 92-94	3.3	88-89	4.3	138-142	3.0	260-261	4.3	261-297	3.7	3.6
Glorfeld et al.	17-21	3.7	93-94	3.3	112	5.3	106-107	4.7	-	6.0	-	6.0	169-176	4.3	4.8
Gorrell and Laird	249-253	2.3	405-406 413-414	4.0	309-311	3.0	217-220	3.0	36-38	3.3	323-332 482-484	2.3	372-380	3.3	3.0
Guth	25-31	3.0	299-300 314-315	3.7	121-122	3.0	134-136	4.3	165-168	3.0	-	6.0	364-390	3.3	3.8
Hodges and Whitten	52-57	2.7	126-130	2.7	222-227	2.7	245-248	3.0	298	4.3	80-85	3.7	360-367 373-414	3.0	3.2
Irmscher	217-219	2.3	202-203	2.3	188-189	4.0	113-114	3.0	85-86	4.3	173-193	2.3	252-293	2.0	2.9

[a]Efficiency rating on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable.

Table 4 (continued)

Handbook	Subject-verb agreement		Use of semicolon		Wordiness		Subordination in sentences		Topic sentences		Revising a composition		Documentation		Mean rating
	Pages	Eff.[a]	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	Pages	Eff.	
Jacobs and Jacobs	196-199	3.3	234-235	3.3	190-191	3.3	150-151	5.7	50	5.0	245-260	2.7	115-132	3.0	3.8
Kierzek et al.	243-251	2.7	333-336	3.0	394-400	2.7	182-188	2.7	passim	3.7	71-74	4.0	107-130	3.3	3.2
Lefcowitz	313-316	3.0	246,259 261-262	4.0	180-182	4.0	119-122	2.7	72-74	3.7	23-24 64-65	4.3	221-228	3.7	3.6
Leggett et al.	64-68 484-497	3.3	114-116 129	4.3	344-350	3.7	268-274	3.3	216-218	4.0	viii-ix 192-195	4.3	430-470	3.3	3.7
Perrin and Corder	80-86	2.7	169-172	3.7	359-361	3.0	61-69 373-375	2.3	389-390	3.7	282-295	2.3	472-497	2.7	2.9
Rorabacher	136-140	2.7	198-200	3.7	67-70	4.0	135-136	3.7	28-29	3.7	22-23	4.7	242-260	4.0	3.8
Stone and Bell	142-148	3.0	203-204	2.3	84-86 131-133	2.3	88-89	4.0	60-61	4.0	127-138	2.3	246-258	2.7	2.9
Watkins et al.	18-27	2.7	105-107	2.7	168-169	4.0	48-51	4.0	197-199	2.7	xvii-xix	4.3	277-308	2.7	3.3
Wiener and Bazerman	138-140	4.7	183-184	4.0	163-164	5.0	124	5.0	239-241	3.3	224-233	4.0	300-307	4.7	4.4

[a]Efficiency rating on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable.

Table 5

Overall Ratings of Recently Published Handbooks

Handbook	Textual characteristics	Subject matter areas	Subject matter topics	Mean rating
Baker	2.7[a]	2.6	3.0	2.8
Bell and Cohn	2.8	4.1	3.7	3.5
Corbett	3.0	3.7	4.6	3.8
Crews	2.3	2.3	2.5	2.4
Ebbitt and Ebbitt	3.3	4.1	4.6	4.0
Elsbree and Bracher	3.5	3.2	3.6	3.4
Glorfeld et al.	3.8	4.3	4.8	4.3
Gorrell and Laird	2.6	3.4	3.0	3.0
Guth	3.3	3.2	3.8	3.4
Hodges and Whitten	3.3	2.9	3.2	3.1
Irmscher	2.4	2.1	2.9	2.5
Jacobs and Jacobs	3.5	3.4	3.8	3.6
Kierzek et al.	3.3	2.6	3.2	3.0
Lefcowitz	3.0	2.6	3.6	3.1
Leggett et al.	3.3	3.0	3.7	3.3
Perrin and Corder	2.8	2.4	2.9	2.7
Rorabacher	3.6	3.3	3.8	3.6
Stone and Bell	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.9
Watkins et al.	2.9	2.9	3.3	3.0
Wiener and Bazerman	3.6	3.7	4.4	3.9

[a]On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 the most desirable.

and Jacobs, 3.6; Rorabacher, 3.6; Corbett, 3.8; Wiener and Bazerman, 3.9; Ebbitt and Ebitt, 4.0; and Glorfeld et al., 4.3. Thus, of the twenty recentlay published handbooks, fourteen were found to be satisfactory; and six, unsatisfactory. None of the handbooks were rated at either end of the scale (1.0 to 2.0, 5.0 to 6.0).

Comparison of Desired Characteristics and Characteristics in Existing Handbooks

After data from the two sources of information--the questionnaire to teachers and the handbook analyses--were gathered, a comparison was made of the data from the questionnaire and the data from the handbook analyses. An item by item comparison was made between desired characteristics and existing handbooks as to physical characteristics, textual characteristics, and subject matter characteristics.

A comparison of physical characteristics showed these similarities and differences concerning cost, number of pages, exercises, instructor's manual, and workbook. Although the desired cost of a handbook was less than $6.00, half of the handbooks sold for $6.95 or more. The desired total number of pages was 300 or fewer; yet only four handbooks were this concise. Exercises were desired by teachers; all except four of the actual handbooks included exercises. Teachers indicated that they wanted an instructor's manual; all but six of the actual handbooks had an instructor's manual (one of these six had an annotated instructor's edi-

tion of the handbook). Teachers wanted a workbook; yet only six of the existing handbooks had a companion workbook.

Comparisons were made between the desired and the existing handbook characteristics as to these textual characteristics: page layout, accessibility of information, appropriateness of examples, author's attitude toward language and dialect, style and tone, and race and sex objectivity. Teachers indicated on the questionnaire how textual characteristics should be executed. The panel's evaluations of the existing handbooks showed how well these characteristics were actually carried out.

Page layout characteristics were ranked by teachers in this order: emphatic spacing, boxes for most important concepts, two or more colors of ink, many headings, and variety of type styles. Slightly more than half (eleven of the twenty) handbooks received a satisfactory rating on their page layout. On the questionnaire, teachers said that information was made accessible through these methods (from most to least effective): detailed index, quick reference charts on endpapers, detailed table of contents, guide words on each page, chapter tabs, and color key. Except for one handbook, all the handbooks were rated satisfactory on the accessibility of their information. Teachers said that they wanted examples to be plentiful and related to the student's experiences. The sources, from most to least desirable, were student papers, combination of sources,

thought-provoking essays, well-known writers, popular periodicals, humanistic-centered articles, no particular source, and professional journals. Seven handbooks, about a third of them, received an unsatisfactory evaluation in regard to their examples. Teachers preferred a handbook in which the author's attitude toward language and dialect was descriptive, was accepting of conventional practice, and recognized various levels of usage. Only one of the existing handbooks failed to be acceptable in language attitude. In style and tone, teachers wanted a handbook that was informal, yet serious, and was addressed to the student. Six of the existing handbooks fell short in these respects. Teachers preferred a handbook free from racial and sexual bias. Except for one handbook that was rated unsatisfactory on racial bias, all the handbooks scored satisfactory on race and sex objectivity.

The desired characteristics and existing characteristics were compared on these bases: grammar and usage, punctuation, words, sentences, paragraphs, whole compositions, and library research papers. The questionnaire responses indicated which subjects should be included in a handbook, and the panel's handbook evaluations showed the efficiency with which the subjects were treated.

Grammar and usage items preferred by teachers were these: correction chart, parts of speech, glossary of grammatical terms, list of principal parts of irregular verbs,

differences in dialect, and levels of usage. An evaluation of existing handbooks showed that almost half of then (nine of the twenty) were deficient in their treatment of grammar and usage. On the more specific grammatical item of subject-verb agreement, four handbooks were deficient. Items relating to the category of punctuation and mechancis desired by teachers were punctuation, capitalization, and mechanics. Only one handbook failed to receive a satisfactory rating in this category. However, when evaluated on their treatment of a specific punctuation mark--the semicolon--eight handbooks were given an unsatisfactory rating. Certain items concerning words were desired by teachers: conciseness, spelling, use of the dictionary, and figures of speech. Of the existing handbooks, four were found lacking in their treatment of words. Eleven handbooks were judged inefficient in their coverage of the topic wordiness, or conciseness.

Teachers wanted these aspects of sentences: sentence patterns, sentence units, sentence fragments, and subordination in sentences. A sizable number--seven-- of the existing handbooks were deficient in this area. Moreover, eleven handbooks were rated unsatisfactory in their treatment of the specific topic, subordination in sentences. In the subject matter category, paragraphs, teachers wanted discussion of paragraph development and paragraph organization. Four of the handbooks were rated unsatisfactory in this category. On the specific item of paragraph organization--

topic sentences--most of the handbooks (fourteen) fared poorly. Teachers wanted these items concerning whole compositions: choosing and narrowing a subject, audience analysis, prewriting, formal outlines, revising a paper, fallacies in logical thinking, persuasive writing, answering essay questions, reports on books or articles, writing essays (themes) about literature, and business letter writing. Six of the existing handbooks were found deficient--several seriously so--in this category. On the specific topic, revising a composition, most of the handbooks (thirteen) were deficient. In the last subject matter category, library research papers, teachers wanted these items: using the library, taking notes, writing a research paper (library paper), documentation of papers in the humanities, and documentation of papers in the sciences. Of the existing handbooks, four were rated unsatisfactory in their treatment of library research papers. When rated on the specific topic, documentation, six handbooks were given an unsatisfactory rating.

CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the findings of this research, conclusions were reached concerning a comparison of characteristics desired by college English teachers in a composition handbook with characteristics of recently published composition handbooks. These conclusions are as follows:

1. As to physical characteristics, teachers said that they want an inexpensive, concise handbook with exercises, an instructor's manual, and a workbook. None of the recently published handbooks fulfill all of these requirements.

2. Regarding textual characteristics, teachers said that they prefer a handbook with a page layout that makes use of emphatic spacing and boxes for most important concepts. Teachers stated that information should be made accessible through a detailed index, quick reference charts on endpapers, detailed table of contents, and guide words on each page; teachers indicated that a code system for rules should be included. Teachers said that a handbook should have many examples, preferably from student papers, combination of sources, thought-provoking essays, well-known writers, and popular periodicals; examples should be student related. Concerning language and dialect, teachers indicated that they want a handbook whose author's attitude is descriptive rather than prescriptive, which is accepting of conventional practice, and which recognizes various levels of usage. In style and tone, teachers reported that they want a handbook that is informal, yet serious, and is addressed to the student. Teachers said that they desire a handbook that reflects racial and sexual objectivity. Most of the recently published hand-

books were unsatisfactory on at least one of the textual characteristics; seven of the twenty handbooks, however, were satisfactory on every item. On an overall textual basis, three handbooks were unsatisfactory.

3. For subject matter, teachers indicated that they want a handbook that treats with breadth and depth these things: grammar and usage, punctuation and mechanics, words, sentences, paragraphs, whole compositions, and library research papers. In their treatment of these subject matter areas and especially in their treatment of subject matter topics, many handbooks were deficient. In fact, no handbook was satisfactory on every subject matter area and subject matter topic.

4. None of the recently published English composition handbooks sufficiently provided the characteristics that college English teachers desired in a handbook.

NOTES

[1]Joyce Carol Oates, Childwold (New York: Vanguard Press, 1976), p. 117. Punctuation, including ellipsis points, is retained as in the original.

[2]Dorothy J. Hughes, "The Handbooks and the Student: A Question of Agreement," College English, 2 (April 1941), 697-699.

[3]Candace Helgeson, "The Prisoners of Texts: Male Chauvinism in College Handbooks and Rhetorics," College English, 38 (December 1976), 396-406.

[4]Harvey S. Wiener, "Selecting the Freshman English Textbook," College English, 37 (September 1975), 28-34.

[5]Walter E. Myers, "Handbooks, Subhandbooks, and Nonhandbooks: Texts for Freshman English," College English, 33 (March 1971), 716-724.

APPENDIX A

ENGLISH COMPOSITION HANDBOOKS

Baker, Sheridan. The Complete Stylist and Handbook. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976.

Bell, James K., and Adrian Cohn. Bell & Cohn's Handbook of Grammar, Style, and Usage, 2nd ed. Beverly Hills, California: Glencoe, 1976.

Corbett, Edward P. The Little English Handbook: Choices and Conventions, 2nd ed. New York: Wiley, 1977.

Crews, Frederick. The Random House Handbook, 2nd ed. New York: Random House, 1977.

Ebbitt, Wilma R., and David R. Ebbitt. Index to English, 6th ed. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1977.

Elsbree, Langdon, Frederick Bracher, and Nell Altizer. Heath's College Handbook of Composition, 9th ed. Boston: Heath, 1977.

Glorfeld, Louis E., David A. Lauerman, and Norman C. Stageberg. A Concise Guide for Writers, 4th ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.

Gorrell, Robert M., and Charlton Laird. Modern English Handbook, 6th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.

Guth, Hans P. Concise English Handbook, 4th ed. Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1977.

Hodges, John C., and Mary E. Whitten. Harbrace College Handbook, 8th ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

Irmscher, W. F. Holt Guide to English, 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976.

Jacobs, Suzanne E., and Roderick A. Jacobs. The College Writer's Handbook, 2nd ed. New York: Wiley, 1976.

Kierzek, John M., Walker Gibson, and Robert R. Wilson, Jr. The Macmillan Handbook of English, 6th ed. Riverside, N. J.: Macmillan, 1977.

Lefcowitz, Allan B. The Writer's Handbook. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.

Leggett, Glenn, David C. Mead, and William Charvat. Prentice-Hall Handbook for Writers, 6th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

Perrin, Porter G., and Jim W. Corder. Handbook of Current English. 4th ed. Glenview, Illinois: Scott-Foresman, 1975.

Rorabacher, Louise. Concise Guide to Composition, 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.

Stone, Wilfred, and J. G. Bell. Prose Style: A Handbook for Writers, 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977.

Watkins, Floyd C., William B. Dillingham, and Edwin T. Martin. Practical English Handbook, 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.

Wiener, Harvey, and Charles Bazerman. English Skills Handbook: Reading and Writing. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.

APPENDIX B

GUIDELINES: TEXTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Please rate each handbook on the following nine textual characteristics. Use a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 as the most desirable rating. To help you determine your rating for each characteristic, consider the questions below. Put your ratings on the form that is provided. Please feel free to add notes or explanations for your ratings.

Page layout

Is the page layout (design) pleasing?

Is the page layout functional; that is, does it permit the reader visually to separate primary material from secondary material (such as separating a concept or rule from an example)?

Are special devices (such as two or more colors of ink, many headings, variety of type styles, emphatic spacing, or boxes for most important concepts) really effective?

Accessibility of information

Is it easy for a student to look up specific information?

Are the table of contents and the index sufficiently detailed?

Are special devices (such as quick reference charts on endpapers, color keys, guide words on each page, or chapter tabs) really effective?

Cross references

Is there a sufficient number of cross references?

Are cross references given when needed?

Appropriate examples

Is there a sufficient number of examples?

Are examples given when needed?

Can students relate to the examples?

Are the examples typical of student papers?

Author's attitude toward language and dialect

Does the author view language as changing?

Does the author view language as a tool of human beings?

Does the author view language primarily in terms of correct and incorrect, do's and don't's?

Does the author recognize the validity of various dialects?

Style and tone

Is the handbook overly formal?

Is it too colloquial, or too familiar?

Can students see themselves as the intended users of the handbook?

Race objectivity

Are there racial or ethnic slurs or innuendos?

Is one race or ethnic group "favored" over another?

Sex objectivity

Are there sexisms, such as implications that only women are homemakers, elementary school teachers, or secretaries, or that only men are executives, engineers, or surgeons?

Is an individual usually referred to as he?

Overall appeal

On the basis of textual characteristics, how appealing is the handbook as a whole?

GUIDELINES: SUBJECT MATTER AREAS

Please rate each handbook on the following seven subject matter areas. Use a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 as the most desirable rating. To help you determine your rating for each characteristic, consider the questions below. Put your ratings on the form that is provided. Please feel free to add notes or explanations for your ratings.

Areas

Grammar

Punctuation

Diction

Sentences

Paragraphs

Whole compositions

Library papers

For each area

Is the coverage complete?

Is the information accurate?

Are the explanations clear?

Is the material presented in a logical, easy-to-follow manner?

Can students, in writing and revising papers, find answers to their composition questions?

GUIDELINES: SUBJECT MATTER TOPICS

Please rate each handbook on the following seven subject matter topics. Use a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 as the most desirable rating. To help you determine your rating for each characteristic, consider the questions below. Put your ratings on the form that is provided. Please feel free to add notes or explanations for your ratings.

Each subject matter topic is an aspect of a corresponding subject matter area evaluated on the immediately preceding form.

Topics

Subject-verb agreement

Use of semicolon

Wordiness

Subordination in sentences

Topic sentences

Revising a composition

Documentation

For each topic

Is the coverage complete?

Is the information accurate?

Are the explanations clear?

Is the material presented in a logical, easy-to-follow manner?

Can students, in writing and revising papers, find answers to their composition questions?